# TWO-YEAR DEGREES' VERSUS FOUR-YEAR DEGREES', WHICH EDUCATION IN RETAIL BEST PREPARES IT'S GRADUATES?

By

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#### **ABSTRACT**

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The problem of this study was to determine which type of retailing degree, twoyear or four-year, was considered most important by the executives responsible for the recruiting, hiring, and training of today's young retailing professionals.

The population was the CEO, Vice Presidents, College Recruiter, Human Resource Divisions, Regional Managers and Store Managers for the retailing group Saks Incorporated, specifically the Younkers division. Internal research was done to collect and categorize the names of each individual to be included and each was electronically mailed and verbally called.

A random sample was prepared using 100% of the population for the survey with the chosen group of Younkers individuals. (Population 115 X 100% Sample, 115.) 91 percent of the sample responded, 105 persons.

This upper echelon of Saks Incorporated executives generally agreed that it was most important to have the well-rounded degree that they are provided by with those

who possess a four-year degree. This allows the recruit to be more mobile in the everchanging corporate ladder, continuing upward career movement. However, at the store level, a two-year degree is adequate to climb up to Assistant Store Manager and sometimes higher.

As reviewed, preferences by the sample group generally felt it was most important for future recruits to possess a four-year degree, especially at corporate management and above levels. A small percent, however, still believe that it is important to hire recruits with two-year degrees at the store level to keep the store management positions strong.

In the future many of the sample subjects believed that even a four-year degree would not be enough to fill the shoes of what corporate management's needs will be. The subjects saw their future needs moving strongly towards Masters in Business

Administration degrees etc. to acquire all competencies needed at that level; the stores in turn will move towards four-year degrees for all types of store management.

Based on these findings, current needs are a four-year degree for corporate management positions and a two-year degree for store management positions. The future in retail education, as with many other professions, will again be adjusting its programs and graduates to meet the degree expectations of the corporations involved. Soon enough the steps will again rise and graduates will return to college campuses in search of continuing education to fulfill the growing degree expectations of the future retailing industry.

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#### Chapter 1

# **Research Problem and Questions**

### Introduction

The goal of this study is to determine the differences in fashion retailing job opportunities for persons with associate degrees and those with bachelor's degrees in fashion merchandising. What are the perceived differences in educational preparation of those with associate degrees and those with bachelor degrees in programs of fashion merchandising? Is there a real difference in the number of new executive trainees hired who have bachelor degrees and those hired who have associate degrees? Were the opportunities available to the graduates of these programs lessened by the major retailers not hiring trainees with two-year degrees? Does this trend show us that today retail executive trainees need a four-year degree in Retailing/Fashion Merchandising?

All of these factors are keys to investigating whom retailers hire most to fill the shoes of today 's retail executives. After having completed a four-year degree in Retail Merchandising and Management at the University of Wisconsin Stout, Menomonie, WI, and taken a job as a Manager in Training (MIT), how many graduates began to wonder, "Did I really need to go to a college for four years to do what I am doing?" Do graduates with two-year degrees have just as much of a chance at receiving employment and promotion with a company as four-year degree graduates do? Are both prepared equally? Why? Or, why not? This study will help to determine if, in fact, graduates need or don't need a four year degree to begin a career in upper level fashion merchandising positions, who is more qualified for promotion after the completion of training, and lastly who retailers tend to hire the most and for what reasons.

If graduates of two-year fashion merchandising programs were just as qualified, wouldn't it be wiser, especially economically, for those interested in retailing to complete an associate's degree instead of a bachelor's degree? To any logical college student or graduate the answer to this and many other questions is buried deep within the past and present experiences and views of retailers and educators.

# Research Hypothesis

A review of literature indicates that there is a trend in the hiring of retail executive trainees who possess a bachelor's degree in Fashion Merchandising over those who possess an associate degree in Fashion Merchandising. Research also shows that there is a significant difference in job preparation between those who possess a bachelor's degree and those who possess an associate degree. Therefore, the research hypothesis for this study is that retailers who hire executive trainees will select most of their new employees from those candidates who possess a four-year bachelor's degree rather than those candidates who possess a two year associates degree.

# Statement of the Problem

The purpose of the study is to determine the difference in fashion retailing job opportunities of graduates who possess a two-year associate degree in Fashion Merchandising and graduates who possess a four-year bachelor's degree in Fashion merchandising, as measured by SAKS Incorporated retail executives. It is also to identify perceived differences in the educational preparation of graduates with an associate degree in Fashion Merchandising and those with bachelor's degrees in Fashion Merchandising.

## Definition of Terms

Fashion Merchandising Degree Program: An educational opportunity open to those who are interested in the field of retail, to expand their knowledge and competencies in the areas of: Full price department store, Discount department stores, and Apparel specialty stores. Other titles may be: Retail merchandising and management, Retail Marketing, and Retail merchandising.

**Retailing**: Working in the field of retail, including all sales, management, and executive levels, with a focus on the merchandising and marketing of goods.

Full Price Department Stores: The upper level stores, which contain vast amounts of brand name merchandise in everything from socks to sofas.

**Discount Department Stores**: Middle level stores, which carry off-brand merchandise in everything from socks to davenports.

**Apparel Specialty Stores:** Stores that only carry their own brand name products and focus around a certain idea, like men or women's apparel.

**Human Resource Manager:** The staff member of a company in charge of all hiring, recruiting, development and training, as well as sustaining the rest of the employees satisfaction and growth opportunities in their current positions.

#### Chapter II

#### **Review of Literature**

#### **History**

Retailing has had strong growth and expansion since its first appearance in its "crudest form of trading posts" (Smith-Lanz 1970). It was at these trading posts that the Indians and explorers first traded goods for goods; each one could contribute to the others needs and wants. From there, retail expanded into the country peddler, which eventually was replaced by the country store. Through the years, this expansion has created the need for enclosed malls, department store discounters and several apparel specialty stores. Each of these has continued to expand into areas never even considered back in the days of the first trading posts.

Why do retailers exist? To serve the customers. To be successful each retailing organization must be concerned about customer acceptance and need. It is at this level and point that customer service became not only a reality but also a must. "Give the lady what she wants" (Troxell, 1971, p. 162), is a blunt example of the reality that retailing was now experiencing.

To better satisfy the customer service craving it was necessary for retailers to hire employees who were very skilled in this area. One of the best ways to track its development is to reflect on the evolution of retail education over past years.

John Wanamaker established the first formal educational structure dedicated to the teaching of retailing, the John Wanamaker Commercial Institute, in 1896. His main idea was to expand the already working vocational education system that he had been implementing in his New York store since 1882. The next official educational program in

retailing at The Training School for Teachers of Retail Selling, presently known as the Institute of Retail management at New York University, began in 1919. Many other two and four-year colleges followed suit. These have all been formally federal sanctioned since 1936. (Hollander, 1978, p.3) In spite of the many accomplishments, "The relationships between retailing educators and practitioners have not always been as effective as might be desired" (Hollander, 1978, p.4). The major difficulty in the relations between these two groups is that each wants more from the other than can actually be delivered. The educators of retailing want more support in the way of money, encouragement and executive time. The retailers on the other hand want the schools to produce a large supply of "competent people who are fully prepared for both immediate and future productivity, but who will not soon become restless and start reading the employment ads" (Hollander, 1878, p.6 5-6). Although this does create great animosity between the two groups, it is also evident that these quarrels are a kind of intra-family bickering that is normal and by no means terminal.

It is apparent, however, that the fashion retail business needs to have continued specialty courses and programs. Why? The answer seems to stem from three factors: (1) Retail, as business, is in constant contact with the customer; (2) Most high dollar transactions include very high customer, product and transaction involvement; (3) Retailers and retailing educators both know that buying and marketing go hand in hand. (Hollander, 1978, p. 6)

# The Last Forty Years in Education

"In the 1950's retailing courses stressed the role of the buyer in a single, downtown department store; branching was yet to occur, and realistically, career

aspirations were middle management at best; courses addressed this reality" (Mayer, 1989, p. 389). Retailers, in describing their trainee needs, talked in terms of intuitive, creative and fashion-oriented individuals with the drive to succeed.

The 1960's retailing courses, as offered in education climates, all but disappeared. This often was due to curriculums being updated to more analytical and quantitative outlines. For qualified employees, department and specialty stores were in fierce competition with outside businesses. Communication between educators and the retailing community was greatly diminished. Retailers often felt "betrayed, as the pool of students was not being trained in the subject matter of interest to the executives" (Mayer, 1989, p. 399). During this decade there was a lot of misunderstandings and non-communication between professional educators and retailers.

With the beginning of the 1970's, marketing professors became less defensive and more accepting of the specialty area of retailing, which was once again becoming a popular career choice at both two and four year programs. The main academic areas being focused on were marketing and merchandising, with greater emphasis "scientific perspectives" (Mayer, 1989, p. 400).

The 1980's brought us into a very accepting if not encouraging view of retailing in the academic world. There was greater interaction between retailers and those who teach retailing, including the popular idea of experiential learning through cooperative efforts. "During the 1980's, retailing as an academic discipline came of age. The emphasis was on strategic management and marketing rather than merchandise management" (Mayer, 1989, p. 401).

With the onset of the 1990's we have seen a continued decline in support and expansion of retailing as a career choice. Fewer students, both male and female, are entering into its realm every year. Jobs have been disappearing due to the dismissal of much of middle management. Because many of the middle management jobs were those offered to graduates, there is now less of an opportunity to get and keep a stable job in retail. "In January, general merchandise stores dropped 18,000 workers, while apparel and accessory stores lost 17,000 workers" (Ramey, 1994, p. 10). To revitalize a more popular view of retailing, many colleges have changed the title of their retailing program from things such as Fashion Merchandising to Retail Merchandising and Management. With the upgrade of the programs comes the upgrade of the names and reputation, moving briskly into the new millennium.

Another factor affecting the availability of entry-level jobs for both two and four year retail college graduates is the influx of graduates from non-retail majors in the retail job market. Many people being hired for management trainee positions and/or assistant buyers etc. are those who have college majors other than retail. "The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that almost 18 million graduates will have flooded the work force between 1992 and 2005, competing for fewer than 14 million new jobs that require a college degree (Working Woman, 1995, p.11). For retail corporations this could prove to be extremely fortunate, for retail students it could prove to be extremely unfortunate. With the growing acceptance of retail as a career, retailers can now choose from a larger number of quality people from both retail and non-retail programs. "Smart companies are taking advantage of the glut of highly qualified candidates to groom would-be managers. Many of these jobs pay minimum wage to start, but an employee can become an assistant

manager within twelve months" (Woman's World, 1995, p.11). Many of these new hires begin with the thought of leaving for a real job when one becomes available to them, but others do stay and move up the ranks. Thus the level of competition increases, pounding down on those who hold a two-year degree and increasing stress for those who hold a four-year degree.

## **Current Educational Focuses**

In past courses, associate degree as well as bachelor degree programs have focused primarily on department store retailing, perhaps because most of the recruiters represented that type of business. As current retail expansion has occurred so has the need for expanded knowledge on the part of the retail student to understand and implement skills for working with huge discount store chains, such as Wal-Mart, Target and Big K, and specialty retailing groups like The Limited Inc. Why this type of need? With the decline in the "mom and pop" type stores has come an increase in the number of retail formats. These new formats primarily include discounters and specialty stores. The discounters provide an unending variety of products at very affordable price points. Specialty stores, allow customers to enter in to buy one type of item and not have to shuffle through the rest of the store to find it. Both offer a somewhat more convenient and relaxed atmosphere. "The number of college recruiters in these two areas has more than doubled in the last ten years" (Personal Interview, 1994).

#### **Future Needs**

For future educators it is still important to bridge the gap between themselves and retail executives. Although the quality of retail education has increased there is still a need for continued adjustment focusing on the retailers needs for well-prepared executive

trainees. "There is a sense of dissatisfaction on the part of the retail industry with the quality of the candidates presented for executive trainee positions" (Hymon-Parker, 1993). How can these candidates become better prepared? Who will be better prepared, those with two-year associate degrees or those with four-year bachelor degrees? To help bridge the gap between the two groups, essential technical skills have been identified. "The dominant interpersonal skills were the ability to communicate, train, delegate, and role model specific behaviors for employees" (Ollhoff, B., 1991, p.1).

In addition to the technical skills identified, many department store executives also find it important for prospective management trainees to possess in depth background knowledge in the following areas:

- 1. Fundamentals of retailing.
- 2. Store organization and operations.
- 3. Retail buying.
- 4. Pricing.
- 5. Planning and control.
- 6. Retail personnel management.
- 7. Promotion of merchandise.
- 8. Financial control.

"The two most important skills for retailing graduates to demonstrate in the eight areas are the ability to supervise and to demonstrate leadership" (Fishco, 1977, p.1).

Each area must be continually addressed to help maintain the growth of retailing as a career. Students must be properly prepared to enter an executive training program the second that they walk across the graduation stage. If complete education does not occur it

occur it may affect both the retail educators and executives negatively. On the flip side, poor preparation can equal disaster for the unemployed as well as the underemployed graduate. College graduates are more likely to be "under-employed-if they have a job at all" (Working Woman, 1995, p.11).

# Associate or Bachelor's Degree?

Is college imperative? Do students interested in retail management or executive retail positions really need a four-year degree? Is it possible to get an equal position with an associate degree from a technical college? Will graduates with associate degrees have the same opportunities for advancement in fashion retailing as those with bachelor degrees?

All sources point toward the importance of a four-year bachelor's degree over a two-year associate degree in earning a trainee position with the brightest companies. "Without a college education there is only so far you can go in retailing" (Natale, 1977, p.26). For Macy's of New York, "in 1975, 85% of the people recruited into the stores executive training program had four or more years of college. Another 10% had a two year certificate, while the remaining 5% were from within store ranks" (Natale, 1977, p.26). The statistics mentioned previously are from 1975, if a four-year college degree was preferred then it is more than obvious who would have the advantage twenty years later. Retailers tend to feel that two extra years of classroom preparation, as well as internships and cooperative education programs, greatly add to the level of preparation upon graduation. Without these "extras" included, two year associate degree graduates can only hope for mid-management at best. If retail executives already complain consistently about the poor preparation of four year graduates, they have little if no

patience to deal with anything less. Although two-year degree holders may fulfill the expectations of those who graduate with them, the research has determined that they do not fulfill retail executive's expectations. "It's not that college graduates are the only people that can do this kind of work, it's just that employers consider the college diploma to be the best indication at the moment of a kind of ability to work" (Rolling Stone, February 23, 1995, p.55).

#### **CHAPTER III**

## Methodology

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine which type of retailing degree, twoyear or four-year, was considered most important by the executives responsible for the hiring, recruiting and training of today's young retailing professionals.

The questions for this study were:

- 1. What are the perceived differences in educational preparation of those with associate degrees and those with bachelor's degree in programs of Fashion Merchandising?
- 2. Is there a real difference in the number of new executive trainees hired who have bachelor degrees and those hired who have associate degrees?
- 3. Were the opportunities available to the graduates of these programs lessened by the major retailers not hiring trainees with two-year degrees?
- 4. Does this trend show us that today retail executive trainees need a fouryear degree in retailing/Fashion Merchandising?

# Methodology

The subjects used to complete this study were executives at all levels of the Younkers division of SAKS Incorporated. Permission was received from the CEO of SAKS Incorporated, Brad Martin, to access the many executives needed for complete information.

The study design was a combination of quasi-experimental and descriptive research. There was no random assignment to the group. The group was already in

existence. The group was pre-qualified; SAKS Incorporated executives. The researcher did not manipulate the independent variables (the corporate structure). Thus, the study is descriptive research - describing what is expected and preferred by Younkers executives.

#### **Procedure**

The executives had already had a wide range and variety of preferences and need of college graduates and thus were extensively pre-qualified.

## Instrumentation

The researcher devised a series of questions to be included in a survey to determine the needs, expectations and preferences of retail executives.

#### Survey

To complete the study, the researcher established a workable electronic mail survey. This survey will consist of questions concerning the preparation levels of two-year associate degree graduates and the preparation of four-year bachelor degree graduates. It will also focus on the different hiring procedures they use based on both groups of subjects. It will be sent directly to the Chief Executive Officer, Vice Presidents, Corporate Human Resources, Store Managers and Store Human Resource Directors of the 52 Younkers Division stores of SAKS Incorporated. These surveys will be electronically mailed out the second week of November, avoiding the holiday rush and new season. The study will utilize the single observation research design. Data analysis will take place when the completed surveys have been returned and it is determined that a proper sample has been achieved.

#### Data Analysis

Executives expect four-year degrees for corporate level management, prefer them for store management, and choose only to accept two-year degrees when none other may be available or the candidate is highly qualified through experience. The executives prefer a four-year bachelor's degree to a two-year associate degree because of the "extra" requirements and well-rounded expectations that four-year degrees provide. The survey questions specifically referencing store level requirements consistently had preferences of four-year degrees, but accepting of tow-year degrees. However, the corporate level expectations were unanimous that a minimum of a four-year degree was required; soon expectations of MBA degrees may be expected.

#### Chapter IV

#### **Data Analysis**

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine the differences in fashion retailing job Opportunities for persons with associate degrees and those with bachelor's degrees in Fashion Merchandising. Retail executives need to communicate with colleges and clearly outline their current and future preferences and expectations.

#### **Data Analysis**

The data could only be analyzed after the return of the survey research tool. The data compiled is quite self-explanatory, due to the extensive background knowledge and expectations of the executives taking part. The desired results of this study would be to help colleges and students to better develop and implement future degree programs and career choices.

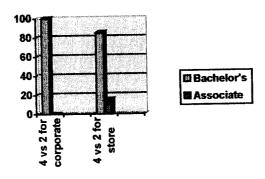
## Research Questions

The questions for research were:

- What are the perceived differences in education preparation of those with associate degrees and those with bachelor's degrees in programs of Fashion Merchandising.
- 2. Is there a real difference in the number of new executive trainees hired who have bachelor's degrees and those who have associate degrees?
- 3. Were the opportunities available to the graduates of these programs lessened by the major retailers not hiring trainees with two-year degrees?

4. Does this trend show us that today retail executive trainees need a fouryear degree in retailing/Fashion Merchandising?

Research Question 1 asked, "What are the perceived differences in educational preparation of those with associate degrees and those with bachelor's degrees in programs of Fashion Merchandising?" According to the survey results, the perceived differences start and end with the "extras" that a four-year degree provides. These perceived differences are a direct reflection of the hiring trends at both the store and corporate levels. When executives are asked the question regarding differences in educational preparation they were all in agreement that the four year degree curriculum produces a more rounded and overall capable new employee, especially at the corporate trainee level. Although executives give value to each of the degrees discussed, the overall findings are that to successfully climb the corporate management ladder the ideal candidate will possess not only career specific qualifications, but also the general knowledge and experience of "worldly" things such as history and science. 100% of the corporate executives surveyed insisted on a four-year bachelor's degree when hiring at the corporate trainee level. When hiring at the store level, 85% preferred the bachelor's degree while 15% were open to associate degree graduates. The findings support the preference of a four-year bachelor's degree over a two-year associate degree.



Research Question 2 asked, "Is there a real difference in the number of retail executive trainees hired who have bachelor's degrees and those hired having associate degrees." Per the survey results, hiring executives believe that there is a clear and relevant difference in the preparation levels of four-year degree recipients and two-year degree recipients. To properly prepare for a corporate retail career it is imperative that the new trainees possess not only the career specific skills, but that they also possess such important skills like effective communication, listening abilities, time management, organizational strengths, team player effectiveness and so on. 100% of the executives surveyed prefer a bachelor's degree rather than an associate degree for corporate trainees. The responses on the survey reflect the attitudes of those who hire new executive trainees; all new hires are expected to have a bachelor's degree. Thus the findings support the results of the survey showing that of all new corporate level trainees hired by the executives surveyed, 100% possessed a four-year bachelor's degree and 0% of those hired at the corporate level have a two-year associate degree. As stated previously, 85% of executives were willing to hire associate degree graduates for the store level and 15% still insisted on a bachelor's degree for store

Research Question 3 asked, "Were the opportunities available to the graduates of these programs lessened by major retailers not hiring trainees with two-year degrees?"

The survey findings reflect the belief that opportunities are indeed lessened by major retailers not hiring trainees with two-year degrees at the corporate level. It is the survey's findings that corporate executives say, yes, those graduates of two-year degree programs will be virtually un-hirable at the corporate trainee level; four-year degrees are the minimum. The two-year graduates, however, will have continued opportunities at the

store level. The executives surveyed, though extremely insistent on corporate level trainees possessing a four-year bachelor's degree agree that two-year associate degree graduates will have continued opportunities at the store level. The findings strongly suggest that it is the belief of the executives surveyed that graduates of two-year degree programs possess adequate skills to be continually successful at the store level, but not at the corporate level. Retailing opportunities for associate degree graduates are greatly reduced in the opinion of corporate executives, due to the perceived "lack" of preparation by two year degree programs. With findings such as these, why are there so many associate level retail degrees available throughout the United States? Simply put, retail stores. Hiring executives may need qualified graduates at the corporate level, but they also need them at the store level. If retail stores weren't staffed correctly with qualified personnel then they would not be successful, and as a result the corporation may fail as a whole. Also, many people may not want to complete a bachelor's degree due to the cost and time commitment and/or they may want to live in specific areas where there are no corporate headquarters. Relocation opportunities and choices of location seem to be greater at the store level, however the stores do lack the continued upward mobility and income opportunities that being part of a corporate office may include.

Research Question 4 asked, "Does this trend show us that today's retail executive trainees need a four-year degree in retailing/Fashion Merchandising?" The results of the survey definitely show a preference, by retail corporate executives, for trainees with bachelor's degrees. The findings reflect a current and continued trend of strong preferences, by retail corporate executives, for the newly hired corporate trainees to complete bachelor's degrees. A four-year degree is the minimum expectation for

corporate level trainees, and to many executives also preferred at the store level. These preferences may soon turn into the absolute norm, requiring *all* store management level new hires to complete a four-year degree program. With this change of preferences apparent, executives may soon create a minimum expectation that corporate level trainees complete a Masters in Business Administration degree over the now preferred bachelor's degree. As with many corporate careers expectations, the findings show that retailers will continue to adjust their preferences and expectations, as there needs change. In Conclusion, it has been shown as the results from the findings of the survey that for now, four-year bachelor's degrees are predominantly preferred and expected.

#### Chapter V

#### Conclusion

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to determine the differences in fashion retailing job Opportunities for persons with associate degrees and those with bachelor's degrees in Fashion Merchandising. Graduates of both two and four-year retailing degrees need to be aware of the career opportunities available to each upon college graduation. Which degree makes the graduates more marketable in executive trainee positions? Graduates need to be prepared.

Retail executives were given a twelve-question survey focused around their expectations and preferences of two-year and four-year college graduates. The question were based on preference and the respondent could choose from four different % spreads, 0-25%, 26-50%, 51-75% and 76-100%.

# Conclusion and Recommendations

Four-year bachelor's degrees are an integral part of today's retailing empire. It is clear that to progress effectively and consistently up the "ladder" in corporate management, a bachelor's degree is needed.

The research questions asked:

- 1. What are the perceived differences in educational preparation of those with associate degrees and those with bachelor's degrees in programs of Fashion Merchandising?
- 2. Is there a real difference in the number of new executive trainees hired who have bachelor's degrees and those hired having associate degrees?

- 3. Were the opportunities available to the graduates of these programs lessened by major retailers not hiring trainees with two-year degrees?
- 4. Does this trend show us that today retail executive trainees need a fouryear degree in retailing/Fashion Merchandising?

The data showed that graduates who acquire a four-year bachelor's degree versus a two-year associate degree are much more desirable to corporate recruiter and executive trainee programs. Based on the data and the conclusion; 100% of corporate executive believe a four-year degree is the minimal acceptable to enter their executive trainee programs.

## Research Question #1

What are the perceived differences in educational preparation of those with associate degrees and those with bachelor's degrees in programs of Fashion Merchandising? Based on the data it can be concluded that that those graduates who possess a bachelor's degree have an advantage as to the level of training they can expect to begin at, in turn creating higher entry-level career opportunities. Based on the conclusions, it can be recommended that for a successful and lucrative retailing degree, one should chose to complete a four-year degree versus a two-year degree. Also based on the data it can be concluded that associate degree graduates are viewed as not being as "well rounded" because their programs do not include the "extras" of the four-year degree programs. Based on the conclusions, it can be recommended that for graduates wanting more choices and opportunities upon graduation a two-year degree will not be an effective way to prepare themselves. In general it can be recommended that students interested in retailing programs should complete a four-year bachelor's degree program.

## Research Question #2

Is there a real difference in the number of new executive trainees hired who have bachelor's degrees and those hired having an associate degrees? Based on the data, it can be concluded that corporate retail executives see a clear and distinct difference in the preparation levels of bachelor's degree recipients versus two-year degree recipients. The survey subjects involved had hired zero executive trainees with less than a bachelor's degree in recent years confirming that to enter a top retail executive trainee program the graduate must have at least a bachelor's degree. Based on the conclusions, it can be strongly recommended that students interested in a retailing degree need to enter and complete a bachelor's degree program.

#### Research Question #3

Were the opportunities available to the graduates of these programs lessened by major retailers not hiring trainees with two-year degrees? Based on the data, it can be concluded that the opportunities for those graduates with less than a bachelor's degree are greatly reduced at the corporate management level. Based on the conclusions, it can be recommend that those students seriously considering a degree in retailing should review job opportunities and expectations of corporate executives before deciding which degree program to take and then choose accordingly.

#### Research Question #4

Does this trend show us that today retail executive trainees need a four-year?

Degree in retailing/Fashion Merchandising? Based on the data, it can be concluded that yes, most definitely retail executive trainees need the minimum four-year degree! Four-year degree graduates are much more desirable and effective for the corporate executive

trainee positions. Based on the conclusions, it is recommended that students interested in a career in retail, especially at the executive level, need to complete a four-year bachelor's degree program.

#### **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to determine the differences in fashion retailing job opportunities for persons with associate degrees and those with bachelor's degrees in Fashion Merchandising. The opportunities have been determined to be greater than expected. When the research began for this study the researcher would have determined that the type of retail degree was irrelevant, not so.

Graduates need to be educated on the opportunities available to them upon graduation, before the are involved in a program themselves. The ability to research and determine future opportunities is a skill that all students and retail executives need to develop and retain.

## Recommendations for Future Studies

The following recommendations are made based on the results of this study. Due to the conclusion reached by this study, it is recommended that educators, students and retail executives spend more time on researching and evaluating post-graduate employment opportunities, program development and educational "extras" to fully complete a student's degree. It is also recommended that future participants of retail degrees determine if graduate studies will be needed for executive level positions.

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Appendix

1.)	In the past 5 years, what % of new hires at corporate level management has had a two-year associate degree in Retail Merchandising/Management?							
	0-25%	26-50%	_ 51-75%					
2.)	At the store l							
	0-25%	26-50%	_ 51-75%	76-100%				
3.)	four-year deg	gree in Retail I	Merchandising/		nad a			
	0-25%	26-50%	_ 51-75%	76-100%				
4.)	At the store l	level?						
	0-25%	26-50%	_ 51-75%	76-100%				
5.)	associate deg	gree?		te management has a two-year				
	0-25%	26-50%	_ 51-75%	76-100%				
6 <b>)</b>								
0.)	At the store 1 0-25%	26-50%	51-75%	76-100%				
7.)	bachelor's de	egree?		te level management have a four-y76-100%	ear			
	0-2370	20-3070	_ 31-7370					
8.)	At the store level?							
	0-25%	26-50%	_ 51-75%	76-100%				
9.)	) Which type of degree is your personal preference?  Two-year degree four-year degree							
	management	t level?		being more desirable at the corpora	ate			
	Two-year de	egree 10	ur-year degree_	<del></del>				
11.)	At the store Two-year de		ur-year degree_					
12.)	What differe bachelor's re		o you perceive	in two-year associate and four-year	ır			

**Survey Consent Form** 

I understand that by returning this survey that I am giving my informed consent as a

participating volunteer in this study. I understand the basic nature of the study and agree

that any potential risks are exceedingly small. I also understand the potential benefits that

might be realized from the successful completion of this study. I am aware that the

information is being sought in a specific manner so that no identifiers are needed and so

the confidentiality is guaranteed. I realize that I have the right to refuse to participate and

that my right to withdraw from participation at any time during the study will be

respected with no coercion of prejudice.

NOTE: Questions or concerns about participating in the research or subsequent

complaints should be addressed first to the researcher or research advisor and second to

Dr. Ted Knous, chair, UW-Stout Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human

Subjects in Research, 11 HH, UW-Stout, Menomonie, WI 54751, Phone (715) 232-1126

Sincerely,

Jennifer L. Weigold

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